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To the North Fork  
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UNCORKING THE CITY | By Lettie Teague

# Long Road to Long Island

When Seferino Cotzajoy left home at the age of 15, he told his mother that he was seeking "a better future" than he envisioned for himself in Guatemala. He made it as far as the Arizona border, where he was apprehended by the Immigration and Naturalization Service and taken to a youth shelter for undocumented minors. He lived there until he turned 18.

It's an atypical start to a winemaking career, but Mr. Cotzajoy is an unusual—and certainly determined—young man. Now 28, he's the assistant winemaker at Bedell Cellars on the North Fork of Long Island, a job that Mr. Cotzajoy calls "a dream come true."

Mr. Cotzajoy has been working at Bedell Cellars since 2005, when he answered an ad for a cellar worker that had been posted in the local paper. He was a landscaper at the time, but his brother, already employed by Bedell, urged him to apply. At that point, Mr. Cotzajoy had never even tasted wine.

That changed considerably over the years. "Seferino grew up here," said Bedell's head winemaker, Richard Olsen-Harbich, who joked that Mr. Cotzajoy's last name was actually Bedell. Mr. Cotzajoy was the winery's cellar master when Mr. Olsen-Harbich arrived in 2010, but Mr. Olsen-Harbich soon took note of his protégé's talent. "Sef had really good technical skills in the cellar; I was impressed by his knowledge and palate—and the vision that he had for the wines," said Mr. Olsen-Harbich, who promoted Mr. Cotzajoy to assistant winemaker in 2012.

How did Mr. Cotzajoy make the transition from cellar worker to winemaker? "One day when I was cleaning tanks and drains I saw Kip Bedell tasting wine in the lab and I thought, 'I want to learn more about that,'" said Mr. Cotzajoy, naming the winery's founder and namesake. In fact, it was a Merlot made by Mr. Bedell that was the first wine Mr. Cotzajoy ever tasted.

Mr. Bedell, one of the North Fork's winemaking pioneers, sold his eponymous winery many years ago to New Line Cinema's former CEO and co-chairman, Michael Lynne, though he has remained involved with Bedell Cellars in the role of consultant.

Mr. Olsen-Harbich is also a Long Island wine pioneer, having spent 33 years making wine in the region. In the early years, he recalled, "all the vineyard workers were from Poland." Today, almost all of the work is done by Latinos—especially Guatemalans. "This industry wouldn't function very well without the Latin-American community," said Mr. Olsen-Harbich.

And yet aside from Mr. Cotzajoy, he couldn't think of another Latino who had risen as far—at least not on Long Island. "There are Latino winemakers in California but not here," noted Mr. Olsen-Harbich, who added it was his dream that Mr. Cotzajoy would take his job one day.

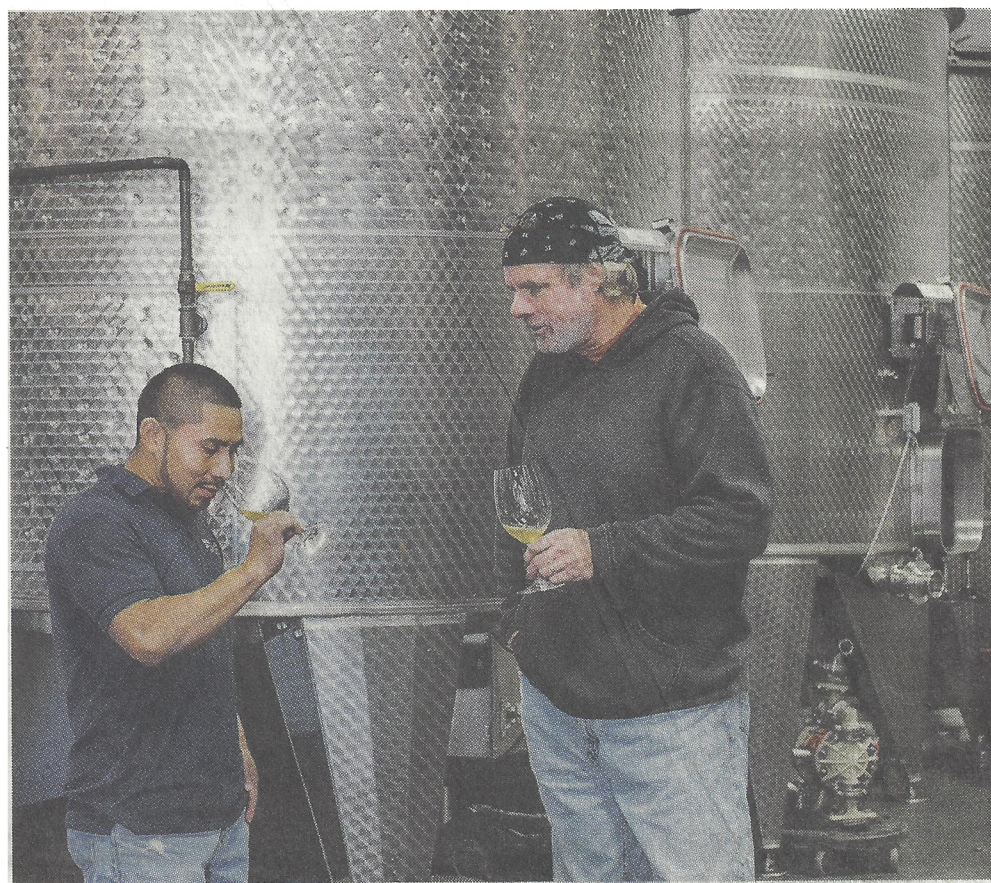
Mr. Cotzajoy just smiled modestly and shook his head. "I'm having fun," he said.

The fun on the day of my visit included a tasting of various Bedell wines; the Bedell portfolio, at 16 different selections, is impressively large. The two men taste together every day in the cellar. Although they may have different palates, they both know "what the end game is and what we want," according to Mr. Olsen-Harbich.

The tasting began with the



Above, Seferino Cotzajoy, assistant winemaker at Bedell Cellars, loads harvested grapes into a crusher. Below, Mr. Cotzajoy and the vineyard's winemaker, Richard Olsen-Harbich, in the tank room; a bottle of Taste Red.



2012 Bedell Taste White, a signature aromatic white blend that Mr. Cotzajoy described as having "peachy aromas and a zippy finish." He was even more keen on the 2012 Gallery White, a big, rich, barrel-fermented Chardonnay that Mr. Cotzajoy confided was one of his favorites.

## 'Seferino grew up here,' said Bedell's head winemaker.

The lineup of reds was a great deal larger, including two of Bedell's signature grapes, Merlot and Cabernet Franc. I've long been impressed by Bedell's Cabernet Franc, and the juicy, bright 2012 bottling was a standout. Messrs. Olsen-Harbich and Cotzajoy have begun making a Cabernet Franc Reserve, too—a bigger, more structured version of the grape. We also tasted several Merlots, including the impressive just-released 2010 wine, the 30th

anniversary bottling.

One of Mr. Cotzajoy's favorite wines was the Taste Red, the Merlot-dominant companion red blend to the Taste White. "I always look for a juicy wine with a pomegranate character," he said, adding that he thought the Taste Red was a good wine for a "romantic dinner." Mr. Olsen-Harbich laughed. "Sef is a bachelor," he said. "Do you know anyone?"

Mr. Cotzajoy lives in Mattituck with his brothers, both of whom are married, though their wives still live in Guatemala. Mr. Cotzajoy returns home when he can—usually twice a year, often carrying bottles of Taste Red. It's much easier to travel since he got his green card in 2010. Before that, he held a work permit that had to be renewed every year.

Does his mother ever ask if he is coming back to Guatemala? She doesn't, said Mr. Cotzajoy. She knows that his life is elsewhere now. "I want to stay here; this is my home now," he said. It wasn't entirely clear if he meant Bedell Cellars or Long Island, though it seems likely that it's both.

